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Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 120 (2014) 90 – 97

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**Procedia**  
Social and Behavioral Sciences

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The 3<sup>rd</sup> International Geography Symposium - GEOMED2013

## Ethnic minorities in ciudad de México (Distrito Federal)

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### Abstract

The 2005 Mexico Population Census reveals 70 different languages used in the country. In Mexico, ethnicity is defined based on the language used by a given individual. The indigenous population of Mexico numbers over six million, which is 6.5% of the country's overall population. The capital city of Mexico, known in Spanish as Ciudad de México (Distrito Federal), is a special case with a small percentage of indigenous peoples (1.5%) but a very large variety of languages. The same is true of the adjacent State of México. The paper covers the spatial distribution of ethnic groups across Mexico City as well as selected social characteristics. This includes the age structure and the level of illiteracy for the indigena population and the Spanish-speaking population as well as the Human Development Index. The paper also analyzes the standard of living of both studied populations. The standard of living was measured in terms of selected household products owned by indigena peoples and Spanish speakers.

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of GEOMED2013.

*Keywords:* Mexico, ethnic groups, linguistic differentiation, social structures, standard of living

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### 1. Introduction

Mexico possesses a rich cultural history and a diverse population, which includes a large variety of native Mexican populations. The first national census in Mexico was held in 1895. Each consecutive census encountered a number of difficulties in the process of counting members of Mexico's native groups. The means used to identify and count ethnic minorities changed over time. Somewhat unusual measures were often employed to identify ethnic minorities including the type of shoes and clothing worn, type of food consumed, type of living conditions,

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languages spoken as well as self-reported identification with a particular ethnic group. It was eventually decided (approx. 1960) that the use of an indigenous language is one of the more credible indicators of the degree to which an individual is associated with a given ethnic group. Individuals who speak only one language were assigned to the ethnic group using that particular language. In 1970 bilingual individuals were added to the ethnic classification system (López Villar, 2005).

Mexico is divided into 32 states including the Distrito Federal, which is located in the central part of the country. The capital of Mexico is located in the Distrito Federal, which also encompasses the central part of the Valley of Mexico Metropolitan Area (VMMA). The VMMA includes 76 townships in the Distrito Federal and neighboring states of México and Hidalgo (*Delimitación de las zonas...*, 2007, Winiarczyk-Raźniak & Raźniak, 2008). The Distrito Federal is divided into 16 boroughs. Moreover, it belongs to the global cities with very strong international links (Raźniak, 2012, Winiarczyk-Raźniak & Raźniak, 2012).

The purpose of the paper is to show ethnic differences in the Distrito Federal based on two principal groups of inhabitants – indigenous residents and Spanish speaking inhabitants. In Mexico, language is used as a basis for differentiating ethnic groups. It is a rather narrow criterion, which does not take ethnic and cultural issues into account. If such issues were to be considered, it would turn out that the number of *indígena* peoples in Mexico is far larger than that officially reported. There are, however, no official statistics to back this up (Winiarczyk-Raźniak, 2011). On the other hand, language is a “hard” criterion that easily places an individual within a particular ethnic group. This hard approach eliminates the difficulties associated with the identification of *indígena* peoples, as many Indians are of mixed race (*mestizo*; Szot, 1981).

*Indígena* (Indians, native peoples) are defined to be individuals who speak a native Mexican language, which does not preclude a knowledge of Spanish (official language of Mexico). Spanish speakers are defined to be individuals who only speak Spanish. The use of an indigenous language and being part of a particular ethnic group are defined for persons at least five years of age. Hence, this paper only covers persons at least five years of age and listed in the national census of 2005 (*II Censo de Población y Vivienda*, 2005).

In 2005 over 90 million Mexicans were at least 5 years of age. About 6 million Mexicans were identified as speaking an indigenous language. This is just under 6.7% of the population of Mexico over the age of five. The national census of 2005 identified 70 different languages in Mexico, which translates into 70 different ethnic groups. The largest percentages of native Mexicans were identified in the southern state of Oaxaca (35%) and Yucatan (33%). Two of the most ethnically diverse states were the state of México and the Distrito Federal, whose residents use 58 of the 70 languages identified in the national census of 2005. Both Mexico City (Distrito Federal) and its entire metropolitan area located in the state of México are key migration magnets for Mexico's indigenous population (Granados Alcantar, 2005).

The urbanization of the native population is the outcome of two processes: 1) spatial expansion of cities, which annex ancient settlements, 2) migration of the native population to cities. When a native Mexican settlement becomes part of an urban area, its native residents continue to live there. The migration of native Mexicans from the countryside to the city is simply part of a broader rural-urban migration process (*Housing Indigenous Peoples...*, 2009).

*Indígena* peoples have been present in Mexico City since its early beginnings. Once the Spanish conquistadors conquered the city, its population became spatially segregated. Conquistadors settled in the city center, while native peoples were forced to move to peripheral areas. Segregation during the Spanish colonial era was made into law. Spaniards could not live in indigenous areas, while ethnic peoples were limited to designated areas. This segregation lasted for centuries, with *indígena* peoples residing in designated areas only, which largely excluded them from the life of the city (Audefroy, 2005). Today Mexico City is clearly a city of immigrants. Both the Distrito Federal and the entire Mexico City metropolitan area are key immigration destinations for the Mexican *indígena* population (Cea Herrera, 2004; Granados Alcantar, 2005). The economic crisis in Mexico in the 1960s further increased the influx of rural residents to Mexico City (Bianet Castellanos, 2008).

Indigenous peoples of all ethnic groups constitute 1.5% of the residents of Mexico City. The southern part of the city known as Milpa Alta has the largest percentage of *indígena* residents – over 3%. The Xochimilco part of the city ranks second in this respect. Only a fraction of one percent of native peoples do not speak Spanish (Fig. 1). The largest percentage of the non-Spanish speakers – 0.2% of all indigenous peoples – can be found in the Iztacalco part of the city.

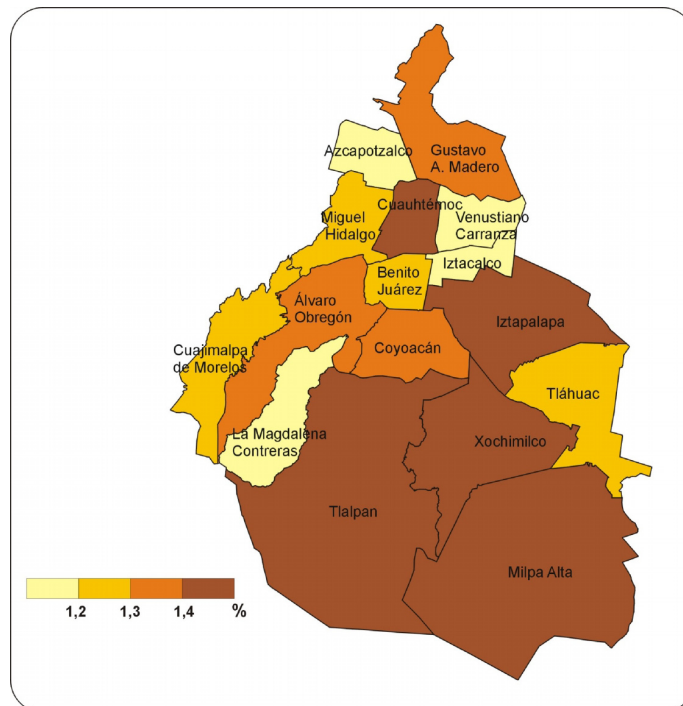


Fig. 1. Percentage of Indians in Distrito Federal (2005).

Source: own compilation based on *II Censo de Población y Vivienda*, 2005, INEGI.

The different parts of the Distrito Federal tend to use different languages. The southern part of the city, Milpa Alta, is the most homogeneous, while the most heterogeneous parts of the city are Cuauhtémoc and Venustiano Carranza (Table 1). The principal indigenous language in the Distrito Federal is Nahuatl. It is used by 25% of the *indígena* peoples in the city. The Milpa Alta part of Mexico City has the largest percentage of Nahuatl speakers (50%). The Otomí language is the second most popular ethnic language in Mexico City – it is used in seven neighborhoods.

Mixtec and Zapotec languages are also found as second most popular languages in four neighborhoods each. The Mazahua language was the second most popular language in the Cuajimalpa de Morelos neighborhood. The Otomí Indians live mostly along the fringes of the city. The largest Otomí community can be found in the Xochimilco neighborhood. The reason why the Nahuatl, Otomí and Mazahua languages are the most common indigenous languages in Mexico City is the city's close proximity to areas with a large Nahuatl, Otomí and Mazahua population. Another reason is the general trend for neighboring populations to migrate to the urban core – in this case from the state of México to Mexico City (Winiarczyk-Raźniak & Raźniak, 2008).

In addition to the ethnic composition of Mexico City, selected demographic and social issues were investigated for the native peoples and Spanish-speaking populations. The age and gender structure was analyzed for the two groups and compared to national data (Fig. 2). The pyramid for all Mexican indigenous peoples is progressive, which means it has a sharp peak. The pyramid for indígena peoples living in Mexico City is gentler and more closely resembles the Spanish-speaking population of Mexico City, which is characterized by a high percentage of individuals over the age of sixty. The percentage of young peoples is high among native peoples in general, while among indigenous residents living in Distrito Federal it is somewhat lower. Apparently native peoples living in Mexico City tend to adopt behaviors typical of the city's non-ethnic population. It can therefore be concluded that there is a promising phase in the aging process of the population, which in European countries (both in the countries of Western Europe, but also in Poland) are also visible at different stages of completion (Zuzańska-Żyśko, 2003; Kurek, 2008; 2011a; 2011b).

Table 1. Percentage of people using Indian languages in Distrito Federal (2005).

	Nahuatl	Otomi	mstec languages	zapotec languages	Mazateco	Mazahua	Totonaca	Mixe	Tlapaneco	Maya	other
Alvaro Obregón	25,14	9,57	9,24	6,20	5,12	9,01	3,25	3,61	1,53	0,68	26,66
Azacapatzalco	25,08	11,57	4,62	11,48	3,25	4,92	4,74	1,73	0,52	1,21	30,88
Benito Juárez	26,62	8,13	7,40	11,09	5,17	4,43	2,35	2,67	1,32	2,52	28,29
Coyoacán	25,54	7,96	8,54	8,39	8,11	4,79	2,70	4,86	1,72	1,34	26,05
Cuajimalpa de Morelos	26,82	10,16	7,24	5,32	2,82	16,39	2,82	3,25	0,85	0,43	23,90
Cuauhtémoc	19,41	14,91	5,71	9,30	8,13	8,48	2,84	1,81	1,72	2,00	25,69
Gustavo A. Madero	26,67	15,09	7,39	10,21	7,45	3,07	6,04	1,68	1,18	0,96	20,25
Iztacalco	20,05	7,46	11,36	12,18	10,75	6,24	2,94	1,80	0,91	0,96	25,36
Iztapalapa	22,98	7,96	15,95	7,62	9,87	7,39	3,03	1,88	1,34	0,63	21,34
La Magdalena Contreras	27,79	8,76	8,47	8,27	6,88	5,28	5,81	2,74	1,84	1,11	23,05
Miguel Hidalgo	24,07	11,12	7,08	12,82	4,57	8,61	2,28	2,44	1,19	1,19	24,63
Milpa Alta	49,77	10,33	11,83	2,75	7,92	6,54	1,69	0,81	0,34	0,16	7,86
Tláhuac	25,54	14,60	12,64	11,47	4,63	3,76	3,54	1,68	1,48	0,61	20,05
Tlalpan	27,43	6,90	11,63	6,53	6,70	4,04	6,86	4,21	1,00	1,27	23,43
Venustiano Carranza	20,98	10,22	6,24	11,44	8,97	7,96	2,90	1,85	0,55	1,17	27,73
Xochimilco	33,62	15,95	8,90	4,73	11,06	5,33	3,02	2,49	0,82	0,55	13,53

Source: own compilation based on *II Censo de Población*, 2005, INEGI.

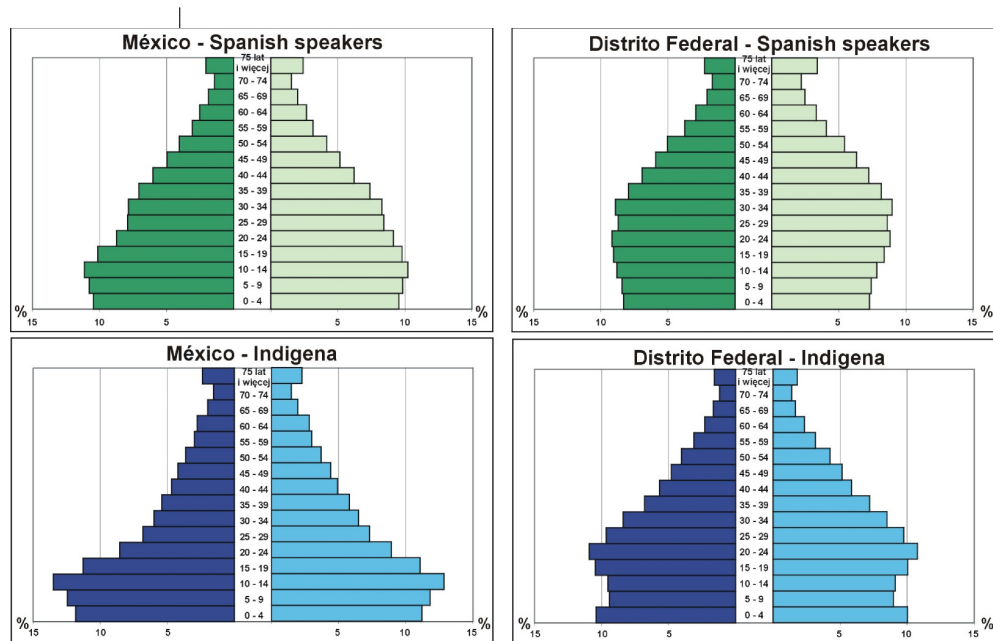


Fig. 2. The age and gender structure of Indian and Spanish-speaking populations (2005 r.).

Source: own compilation based on *II Censo de Población y Vivienda*, 2005, INEGI.

The percentage of illiterate individuals is more or less the same for both studied populations. Illiterate inhabitants tend to concentrate in the southeastern part of the city (Fig. 3). The differences in the percentage of illiterate inhabitants can vary significantly. The smallest percentage of illiterate indigenous was larger than the largest percentage of illiterate Spanish speakers. The highest percentage of illiterate native residents (12%) was found in the Milpa Alta part of the city. The same was true of the Spanish-speaking population (4.4%).

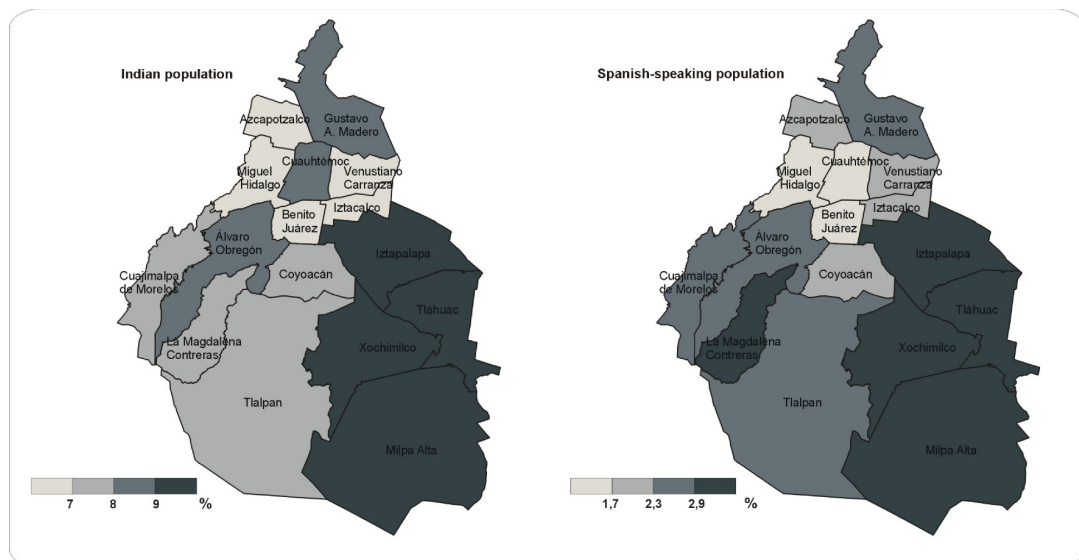


Fig. 3. The percentage of illiterate inhabitants in Distrito Federal (2005 r.).

Source: own compilation based on *II Censo de Población y Vivienda*, 2005, INEGI.

The Human Development Index (HDI) is used to describe the degree to which human needs are being met. Figure 4 shows the HDI for Indians and Spanish speakers. The highest HDI values for native peoples were the same as the lowest HDI values for Spanish speakers. The spatial distribution of the highest HDI values was more regular for Spanish speakers – concentrating in the center of the city. Fringe areas of the city were characterized by the lowest HDI values. HDI values for indigenous inhabitants were distributed more irregularly.

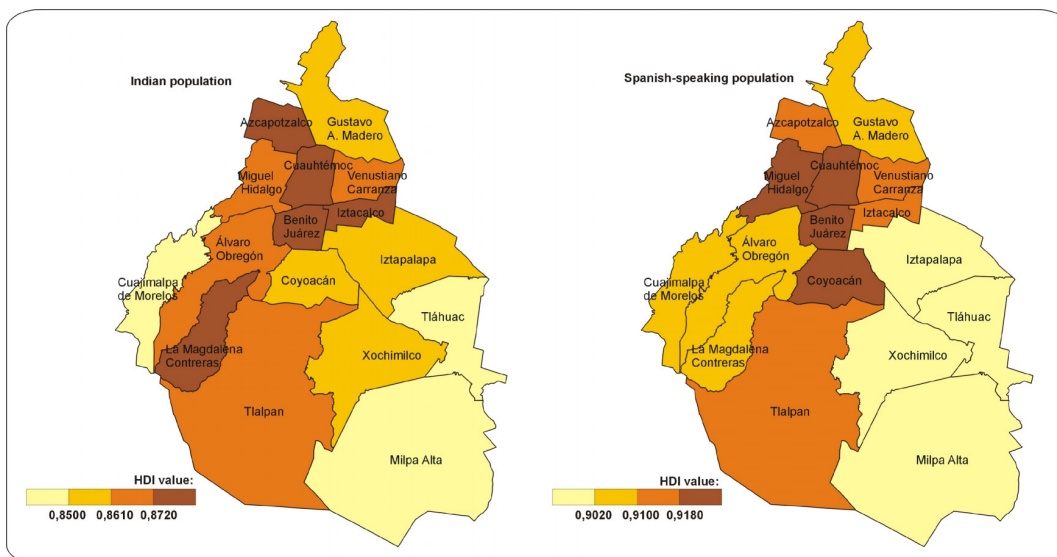


Fig. 4 The Human Development Index in Distrito Federal (2005 r.).  
Source: own compilation based on II Conteo de Población y Vivienda, 2005, INEGI.

The mean HDI value for indigenous peoples and Spanish speakers was higher than that for Mexico as a whole. This difference was larger for native Mexicans. In 2006 the UNDP suggested an HDI study for selected ethnic groups. Standard measures were used and supplemental measures were created in order to better fit various administrative units and ethnic groups. The supplemental measures indicated differences associated with membership in a particular ethnic group (Fernandez et al. 2006, *Indigenous peoples...*, 2008).

Inequalities in the standard of living were analyzed based on individuals' ownership of household appliances such as a television set, washing machine, refrigerator and personal computer<sup>†</sup>. The percentage of Indian and non-Indian households owning these types of appliances was calculated. The differences between the two groups were also calculated. The various neighborhoods of the Distrito Federal were then ranked based on differences in the standard of living. The largest difference was 16%. The smallest difference was 1%. Differences were calculated for each type of household appliance. The number of points was then totaled for each neighborhood.

The calculation allowed for the identification of neighborhoods with the largest difference in the standard of living between native and non-native residents. The largest differences were noted in the southern part of the city. The smallest differences were noted in the central part of the city (Fig. 5). In order to explain this, mean differences in the standard of living were calculated and compared with the percentage of indigenous residents living in a given area. Areas with a larger percentage of native peoples tended to be characterized by larger differences in the standard of living of *indigena* and non-*indigena* (Coulomb & Schteingart, 2006). One reason for the natives' lower standard of living is the high rate of unemployment for the indigenous population in Mexico City (Blouet & Blouet, 1997).

<sup>†</sup> More on household preferences, factors, and consequently their purchasing decisions in: Szymańska 2011, Szymańska 2012, Szymańska 2013.



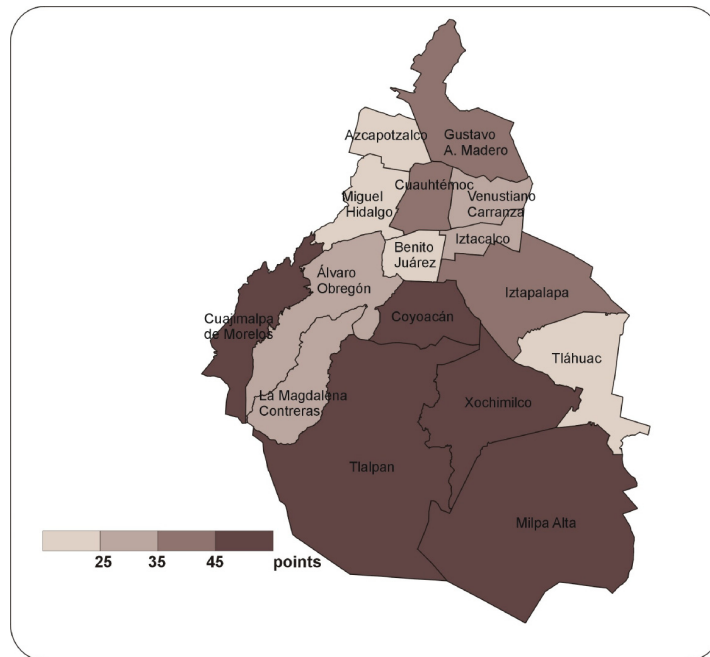


Fig. 5. Hierarchy of neighborhoods of the Distrito Federal based on differences in the standard of living (2005 r.).

Source: own compilation based on *II Censo de Población y Vivienda*, 2005, INEGI.

One issue raised in the research literature is that of identification with a particular ethnic group. The migration of the Indian population to urban areas separates it from its core community and its associated cultural values. Migration can lead to a gradual disappearance of one's ethnic feelings towards one's original ethnic community (Romer, 2005). On the other hand, the influx of many different ethnic groups to Mexico City has created a very multicultural city. In some cases, even the third and fourth generations of migrants maintain their cultural identity and original language (Albertani, 1999).

At the same time, migrants experience a degree of cultural assimilation, which is manifested in the adoption of mainstream Mexican culture and an urban lifestyle (Romer, 2006). Research in the field of anthropology in Mexico tends to be driven by an indigenous ideology and an effort to reactivate Indian culture. A number of research institutions have been created that strive to investigate indigenous culture via applied research projects (Posern-Zieliński, 1995).

The country of Mexico is inhabited by the descendants of pre-Columbian civilizations that had evolved over the centuries and whose evolution was interrupted by the arrival of European colonists. Mexican society has been transforming ever since, with various ethnic groups experiencing cultural adaptation over time. While Mexico's government has made attempts to build a national culture, discrimination as well as social and cultural inequalities continue to affect ethnic communities. One reason for this state of affairs is that native Mexicans initially did not object to the way they were treated due to their cultural beliefs and customs (Sandoval Forero, 2002).

The ethnic minorities of Ciudad de México are a true conglomerate of languages and cultures. This degree of ethnic diversity remains unmatched anywhere in Mexico. The indigenous population in Mexico City differs from the non-native population in terms of demographics, level of education, degree of human development and the standard of living, as measured by the ownership of household appliances. In spite of this, the *indígena* population does exhibit some features of urban life in terms of its age structure. The degree of human development is also higher for indigenous peoples living in Mexico City versus those living outside of Mexico City. While the city is characterized by areas of underdevelopment, which applies to both native and non-native, meaningful differences between the two

populations can still be observed. Research has shown that social inequalities do exist in the study area. These inequalities need to be defined and analyzed in order to pursue a sensible national ethnic minority policy.

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